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ABSTRACT

This collection of essays makes some attempts to define the humanities and explore the social role they might play. Part 1 examines the role of the humanist in society and suggests that the humanist can perform a function when "justification" (the determination of what is right and wrong) is necessary. In part 2, the topic "the public humanist" is explored. This part looks at the challenges Montaigne chose to face and advocates that state humanities programs undertake similar challenges. It discusses the humanities as defined by Congress and whether humanists ought to "dirty their hands" in the public arena. Humanists are urged to overcome their wish for privacy and enter into a study of public issues. One author, in exploring a public role for the humanities, advocates that projects be created to honor the humanist and that humanists be willing to leave the ivory tower and talk to the public. A short concluding article summarizes some of the previous essays and discusses a few questions regarding state programs for the humanities. (Author/JM)

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The Views from Montaigne's Tower

Essays on the Public Uses of the Humanities

ED193746

Edited by Michael Sherman

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THE VIEWS FROM MONTAIGNE'S TOWER:

ESSAYS ON THE PUBLIC USES OF THE HUMANITIES

Edited by

Michael Sherman

(Shelley Simak, Editorial Assistant)

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INTRODUCTION

WALLS OR TOWERS?

THE SEARCH FOR A PUBLIC ROLE AND LANGUAGE FOR THE HUMANITIES

by

Michael Sherman

In his keynote address to the 1978 national meeting of state programs in the humanities (published in Federation Reports, vol. II, no. 4, December 1978), Richard W. Lyman of Stanford University issued a warning to all who would speak of the humanities in general, dare to define them, or venture to discuss their role in public discourse. Humanist that he is, Lyman couched his warning in metaphorical terms when he related a story about Richard Brinsley Sheridan, here quoted as a Member of Parliament rather than as a dramatist.

> His Parliamentary colleagues had introduced an obviously unpopular measure and been defeated on it. Sheridan remarked that, while he had often heard of people knocking their brains out against a wall, this was the first time he had known of anyone constructing a wall expressly for that purpose.

The authors of the essays which follow may, at first sight, appear to have ignored Lyman's fable and constructed a conceptual wall of definitions for their own discomfort. They pursue, in fact, a doubly perilous course; for not only have these authors run the risk of breaking their heads against the stubborn problem of defining the humanities, they have also set before themselves the difficulty of defining a role for the humanities in public discourse and

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public pedagogy.

Humanists in our day are perhaps the only professional group struggling to define both their work and their function; and this may very well account for the so-called crisis in the humanities which has been widely identified and documented in recent years. Among the academic disciplines, neither the natural nor the social sciences have suffered with the kind of internal disagreement about purpose and self-definition that humanists face even in their conversations with each other. The essays contained in this collection reflect some of the divergence of opinion to be found in this internal debate among practicing humanists.

At the same time that the internal debate rages, humanists have failed to present a coherent or consistent argument for their role in public debate on issues of national political importance. Humanists have thus come before public audiences--when they have done so at all--unsure of themselves in such forums and not always convinced that that is in fact where they belong. They have continually faced clouded expressions in audiences of non-academics assembled to discuss public policy issues under the auspices of the state humanities programs and have been reluctant to part the clouds.

This is because the role of the humanities in public life has received less discussion than it deserves in contemporary American culture. While those who work in or with the state programs have made a significant contribution toward the rediscovery of a public role for the humanities, they have also frequently been brought to the point of frustration which makes them see the issue as the ever-present wall against which they beat their heads and exhaust their energies. Furthermore, it remains the case that outside the context of these programs, very few out-of-school adults and very few academic humanists give the topic of public humanism much thought. The important task of being midwife to a public humanism thus remains before us as our first priority.

It is historically and culturally peculiar that the humanities in America suffer from both a lack of self-definition and a failure to see clearly a social role for the knowledge they represent. It is surely unique in the history of the humanities that they are so divided intellectually and isolated from society.

These essays may not offer much comfort to those seeking an easy way out of the current crisis in the humanities. The essays do not singly or together resolve all issues, synthesize in an indisputable way a definition of the humanities, or crystallize a single and unified vision of a social role for the humanities. Rather, they constitute a further development in the current debates and in this respect they are perhaps more useful to participants in the state humanities programs.

At least one author in this collection, Anita Silvers, argues that it is, in fact, the continuing debate that defines the humanities

or, put another way, that the tolerance for open-ended debate is the hallmark of the humanist method of inquiry and humanistic discourse. Another author, Albert A. Anderson, presents us with just such an open-ended dialogue, where not only the definition of the humanities but also their proper role in the society beyond the walls of academe are left unresolved with strong arguments on each side. Even the more solid and apparently reposeful image of Michel de Montaigne contains internal contradictions and tensions, for while Montaigne is discussed here as a model of practical humanism, we must note that he rejected much of the humanist culture of his own day, retreated intellectually to a position of skepticism, and ended up, finally, reading and writing in his tower rather than acting in the world. In addition, Montaigne is preeminently an aristocrat with an aristocrat's tastes, attitudes and education--all of which are ill-suited to a democratic society in search of a democratic humanism.

These essays, then, suggest some choices. They offer tentatively and always with a demurrer, some models of thought and action. They establish some metaphors for humanistic thought and activity in the world which are meant to be argued with and argued over. Their very suggestiveness will underline the problems and issues faced by the state humanities programs, each of which must not only define for itself the humanities and a role for them in society, but must also try to define its own role in its state and community.

In such circumstances, metaphors may not be the stuff that program development plans are made on. But if--and the point is, after all, disputable--metaphors are not good as the foundation stones of public programs, they are at least less harmful than the stone walls of rigid definitions and unexamined pieties about the need for the humanities in public life that some of us in the state programs have, like Sheridan's colleagues, constructed for our own discomfort and cling to in a desperate attempt to explain to a doubtful society just what it is we do. Finally, if they accomplish nothing else, perhaps these essays will allow us to live more comfortably with the "soft" language of metaphors, the language which has, after all, traditionally been that of the humanities.

PART I DEFINING THE HUMANITIES

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Anita Silvers addresses the question "What expert advice can we humanists purvey to the public?" Her answer, "Perhaps humanists can teach the public how to tolerate the absence of closure, how to appreciate pursuing the path if one cannot luxuriate in having reached the destination, how to enjoy rather than fear differences of opinion and approach -- in short, how to accept real life if real life is as freely indeterminate as human beings rather than as causally controlable as machines."

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Richard Wasserstrom maintains that "Justification is built in of necessity to every question that gets defined as one relating to public policy because every question of public policy is a question of interpretive significance . . . and if . . . humanists are the only ones who have that as their primary concern then it's obvious that they're the ideal persons to aid in these kinds of inquiries." He does, however, see four impediments -- two from the academic side, two from the public -- to blending the academic and public aspects of state programs.

THE ROLE OF THE HUMANIST

by

Anita Silvers

For many academic humanists, being detached from the things of the world, in the sense that Plato's Forms are independent of the transitory phenomenal world of appearances, is the most desired and desirable state. Nevertheless, many of my colleagues recently have found themselves striding across the boundaries of specialist concerns into the arena of public affairs. Prudence may provide some prompting, since the funding which flows through public universities and public agencies is the largesse afforded and controlled by representatives of the public.

But this motivation would be relatively ineffective, I believe, had academic humanists not also found themselves increasingly alienated from their traditional connection with the real world. Traditionally, it has been through our students that we humanists have made our contributions to the social context. Domiciled within the academy, wondering how to communicate with a generation of students who appear to regard basic reading and writing as exotic pastimes, humanists have been impelled to construct what we hope are relevant applications of our scholarship to current issues. Some of us actually have extended our careers to act as consultants to the practitioners of our society.

For many of my colleagues, this process of coming back into the world is suffused with suspicion as well as with success. What expert advice can we humanists purvey to the public which renders us worth the price of a consultation while allowing us to remain true to ourselves? This question is at least as traditional as our understanding of the differences between Socrates and the Sophists. The answer may be crucial

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to us here and now.

Let me first comment that our exposure in the world cannot but be useful to our humanistic scholarship. In this respect, the experiences of philosophers who have involved themselves with medical ethics, sometimes even serving as consultants to medical personnel in their daily practices, exemplifiesthe intellectual benefits of such interaction.

In general, my colleagues agree that the medical arena produces problems appropriate to their philosophical talents. That is, the application of philosophical theories to these problems of the world illuminates the philosophical theories. The world constitutes a diagnostic tool for examining the strengths and weaknesses of philosophical proposals.

I presume that, as philosophers have found public affairs to be grist for philosophical mills, humanists in other disciplines have had similar experiences. No doubt treading the halls of Sacramento or the corridors of the county jail can nourish studies of Trollope or Dickens, at the very least by providing local color to capture the attention of undergraduates. But direct encounters with humanistic scholarship, even when the scholarship is informed by insights gleaned in the public arena, are unlikely to make a favorably enlightening impact on the general public. The question remains, what can we humanists effectively contribute to the general welfare, to the public good?

In the Socratic manner, I now am going to diverge from my train of argument, hoping that we can flush our quarry by beating around the bush. I would like to relate some observations I made in developing a public forum on the recombinant DNA controversy, a project which was funded by the Council. In working on this and on similar projects, I came to suspect that the public's interest in these issues depended essentially upon the belief that scientists could and would provide definitive answers.

As exhibited by the recombinant DNA debate, the syndrome of public concern and of public confidence is illuminating. It was scientists themselves who first raised the issue of the safety of recombinant DNA.

Extrapolating from certain phenomena which occurred in a laboratory at Stanford, they drew attention to the possibility of danger and urged that precautions be given primacy. Directly, public outcry demanded responses that no one rationally could proffer. While one public sector decreed that either the safety of the research be absolutely guaranteed or else that the research be banished completely, other parts of the public enjoined scientists to make detailed promises about the speculative long-range benefits of the research.

Although these requirements constitute the extremes of the public reaction spectrum, there was sufficient insistence on conducting the discussion in these terms to destroy all chance of a productive resolution. As far as I can see, a main result of the recombinant DNA discussion has been to convince many scientists that they must never again expose their uncertainties to the public.

Humanists could have warned them that this would be so. Think how much less foreign conclusiveness is to the sciences than to the humanities. Cautious though scientists may be, most scientists of my acquaintance are comfortable with such locutions as "Science has proven that...," and "We have established that...," and "It is so because the scientific community agrees." The disciplinary memory of the sciences still is replete with innocent and exhilarating reminiscences of the progress made in our technological age. The public also views science as the contributor of definitive answers.

In contrast, at the core of the tradition of Western humanism lies the prospect which faces those who persist in rejecting nonintricate, unqualified solutions. After all, when Socrates complied with his conscience by cultivating dissatisfaction with easy answers, he was convicted of corrupting the youth.

In defining the humanities, Congress includes "the study of philosophy, history, literature, language, linguistics, jurisprudence, comparative religion, ethics, and archaeology, also the history, theory and criticism of the arts and those aspects of the social sciences concerned with values." What unifies these disciplines? One characteristic thread lies in their shared attitude toward conclusiveness.

Although presuming, for the most part, that there are conclusive answers to be obtained, practitioners of these disciplines typically do not expect to reach general communal agreement about any major disciplinary issue in their own or in any other lifetime. In the sciences, in contrast, practitioners do strive to forge agreement in the community of scientists. Such agreement is of central importance in science because it is foundational for further work. On the other hand, when a matter commands general agreement in the community of humanists, it tends also to be consigned to the periphery of disciplinary attention.

It as if consensus drains a humanistic issue of its productivity. What seems to be characteristic of the humanities is that not the outcomes or conclusions, but rather the processes or renderings of humanistic studies are the locus of value.

The value of Leavis's defense of Lawrence or of Panofsky's account of the Italian Renaissance lies not in their verdicts, enlightening as those verdicts might be, but rather in their exhibitions of how the verdicts were reached. How deadening it would be if we thought that the last word on any major humanistic issue had been pronounced.

Notice that we do not find it appropriate to learn from the work of philosophers, critics, humanistic historians and other humanists by reading abstracts of their work. This is because what we learn is contained in the conduct of the study; indeed, the conduct or process or rendering of the study is the result. Of two essays in literary, art or music criticism, of two treatments of the same philosophical theory or the same historical event, one may be of humanistic value and the other of no value even though they reach identical conclusions.

What I have said here about the importance of execution, as opposed to outcome, is true to some extent

for the sciences as well, but scientists typically believe that only their specialist colleagues are capable of appreciating the virtues of their performances. Therefore, they think that it is scientific conclusions which are to be bartered to the public in exchange for public support of science.

For humanists, I submit, performance is everything. What, then, can we contribute to a public which takes conclusiveness to be an overwhelming virtue and which yearns for the security of durable solutions?

Allow me to propose that humanists do have one small benefit to bestow upon the public. We can demonstrate how to live with reality. If this claim startles those of you who habitually view the humanities as the least practical and therefore most "unreal" of endeavors, I should explain that I consider the public's insistence on practical conclusiveness to be the product of sheer wishful thinking.

More than one legislator has observed with dejection that the problems facing government don't ever seem to get solved. In fact, I suspect, the public itself knows this, even when it is cracking whips like Proposition 13 out of frustration that its fantasies can't be fulfilled. After all, is it likely to be in the nature of things that poverty, viciousness, illness, greed and their consequences can be erased merely by introducing some new wrinkles in the social fabric?

If such scenarios are improbable, then perhaps the models offered by science and technology, which assume final solutions and universal unanimity as predominant aims, mislead and pander when applied to public affairs. Perhaps humanists can teach the public how to tolerate the absence of closure, how to appreciate pursuing the path if one cannot luxuriate in having reached the destination, how to enjoy rather than fear differences of opinion and approach -- in short, how to accept real life if real life is as freely indeterminate as human beings rather than as causally controllable as machines.

I have no doubt that the road I am exhorting us to choose is a dangerous one, with as much possibility of directing us toward hemlock as toward oak and mistletoe. We need to face it with courage and conviction, and we need to recognize that we act as our own worst enemies when we neglect to expand our means for public communication.

If, indeed, we are experts in human studies, we should be able to contact what is human within the public. We might notice, for instance, that within the context of public policy formation, symbols and concepts are as efficacious as facts.

As we humanists specialize in analyzing and communicating on the symbolic level, surely, it is both our obligation and our talent to devise ways of engaging the public in the enlightening uses of symbols. Replete as we are with theories about the appropriate role of legislation in the conduct of human life, for example, we need to formulate these discussions so that we can draw the public into them and get people to face the consistency or inconsistency of their desires in respect to the extent regulative legislation should intervene in daily lives. Above all, we must convince the public that the means of decision-

making are as important as the ends. Doing so requires us to obtain effective modes for symbolizing the complex things we want to say about abstract notions such as the notion of law.

We can succeed only if we can convince ourselves to evolve processes of debate and expression that are suited to the subjects and symbols of public affairs. That is, rather than abandoning our sophisticated and scholarly treatments of reasoning and of symbols, we need to join with our colleagues from the media and from the community to devise effective modes of presenting our activities to the public. We must not think it suffices to relate our convictions to the public while confining the activities which instilled those convictions -- the activities in which humanists experience great excitement, joy and pride -- to exposure to our scholarly colleagues. There is no reason to presume that employing modes of expression other than the learned essay, the lecture or the panel of experts necessarily requires us to relinquish our standards. After all, when Plato developed the Socratic dialogue form, he found a means of diverting public appreciation from the sophistical humanistic commonplaces of Isocrates to the sophisticated Socratic process of philosophical inquiry.

I return to my fundamental theme. If we have sinned, we have sinned by omitting to address forcefully the public's deceptive desire for final solutions. Particularly in view of the fact that our expanding opportunities for public exposure will increase our concerns about public reaction, let me implore us not to be stampeded into forgetting that visions are symbolic and that our tradition commits us to enhancing the public's ability to employ and to evaluate symbols. We must not get into the business of sophistically selling symbols merely because we think it would be profitable to do so. With courage and cultivation, we can get the public to appreciate humanistic endeavors, as long as we can keep in touch with why we ourselves find our work valuable, enlightening and exciting.

"JUSTIFICATION" AND STATE HUMANITIES PROGRAMS

by

Richard Wasserstrom

In attempting to talk about the humanities, a central concern for me is trying to get questions clear so that what I have to say is relevant to the question I'm trying to work out. I have spent a fair amount of time thinking about the very general question that was posed for this session: "What is the relation between the traditional interests of the humanists and new opportunities offered by public programs?" I have had difficulty understanding it, and have felt very concerned that I wasn't sure I had anything to say about it. In part, I'd be inclined to answer the question about what the relationship is between the traditional humanities and public programs by saying that the relationship is obvious. That seems, however, too brief, so I will try to say other more specific things about the concerns we share. In particular, there are four questions about which I'll try to speak: a bit about what the humanities are and how they're connected with this thing called scholarship; what academic humanists have to contribute to programs on humanities and public policies; what academic humanists have to contribute to public programs, which is a broader concept than public policies; and, finally, what impedes more satisfying participation in public programs by the humanists.

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Let me just suggest tentatively an alternative way or taxonomy of thinking about what humanists do or what the humanities are about. I don't propose a definition, just another way of sorting some of these things out. There are three distinguishable, quite fundamental questions which anyone who has a serious interest in being in the academy is concerned about addressing himself or herself to, and the fact that humanists do not focus on all three of these questions may shed some light on what humanists are about. The first question, which is a terribly important one, is what I call the question of explanation, in the sense of giving an explanation by giving some kind of a causal account of how things relate to one another so that one thing produces another. The concomitant of that is giving a theory that permits one predictions of a certain sort. I lump both of those under the general category of explanation. And there are any number of fascinating questions that it seems to me folks appropriately might want to inquire into in this regard: Why do human limbs not regenerate? Why do those of starfish? By what mechanisms do men and women come to have different psychological dispositions and roles in our society? What led to the rise of Jim Crow legislation in the later part of the nineteenth century in the South? Those are all explanatory questions. For the most part, these are primarily, because they are explanatory, within the province of the sciences. That's what science is about -- rendering the correct causal theories which explain and predict. Both the natural and social sciences do that. Since historians do that to some degree, it makes perfectly good sense that historians should be seen as social scientists as well as humanists.

Now the second question which I think is really rather different from the explanatory one is one that I call "correct descriptions," those answering questions relating to meaning and interpretation. Specifically, one very important part of "correct descriptions" is focusing upon ideas, thoughts, and language because these are the kinds of things that do have meaning and that can be interpreted. And where these are the focus -- where the question is one of, What does this mean? or How might it be interpreted or understood? -- we very often do have a humanist at work. One of the things that philosophers, for example, do under this heading of meaning or interpretation might be with the problem of punishment; they'll ask: What does it mean to punish somebody? What is involved in punishing somebody rather than in doing lots of other things to people which might look like punishment but which are different in important respects, such as locking them up in mental institutions, confining them if they have infectious diseases, drafting them into the army? Other humanists might ask other questions: What did the drafters of the Declaration of Independence mean when they said, "all men are created equal?" How are we to understand the significance of the White Whale in Moby Dick? What is the picture of the good life we find presented by Thoreau in Walden? All these are issues of meaning and interpretation of language, ideas, and thought.

One of the things that makes human life and activities distinctive is that they are purposive; when we

talk about human actions as opposed to events occurring in a natural world, we're talking about purposive behavior of one sort or another. Once we have purposive behavior, we can also ask about what those actions mean or how they are to be interpreted, in a sense quite similar to the questions asked when we're thinking about ideas. Thus we can ask, What is the meaning of a ceremony that exists or is adhered to in a certain society? Now it seems to me that when social scientists ask this kind of question of meaning or interpretation of human activity, they are perhaps engaged in an activity which is similar to if not identical with that of the humanist.

The third question is to my mind the most interesting only because it's the one that I spend most of my time on; it's not intrinsically more interesting than the others, but it seems to be the one that gets the least attention within the academy. I call it the question of justification. It too is particularly concerned with ideas, thoughts, human purposes, and human activities. It's concerned very simply with asking the question of how things ought to be, what things are better than others, what things are defensible or desirable and what are not, and in each case not just simply to give an answer but to examine the arguments. We have to examine what is said or done in terms of the construction of the case for why it's correct or plausible, why it's important to think this is right rather than that or to think this is better rather than that or that this is good or admirable rather than the other. That's the problem with justification, of working out what the right answer or the best answer is to any question of a normative sort.

So apart from getting clear on how punishment might be different from other things (that is, a question of explanation), we also certainly have to ask the question, But is it right to punish people, and, if so, why? What are the arguments for why it might be right to punish people? What are the assumptions that are involved before those arguments are considered? Is the picture of the good life in Walden really the picture of a good life for human beings and, if so, why? Is Moby Dick a good piece of literature and, if so, why? It's the most fundamental critical question that humans can ask, this question of justification, that is, making as explicit as we can the reasons why we ought to believe something to be correct or not. Now, it seems to me what is undeniably true about the questions of justification is that if anybody is concerned with those questions within the academy, it is only the humanist -- unfortunately so, but necessarily the case. And any time anyone is interested at all in that question of justification, the one place perhaps to go in the academy is to humanists. This may be a different way, then, of getting a grasp on what humanists are and how they are different from other folks within the university.

What about the humanities and scholarship? The following reflects my own concern that if you focus on the questions rather than anything else, you'll see there's no intrinsic connection between these questions (particularly of justification) and any kind of activity that is in any exclusive sense backward looking, concerned either with spending all of

one's time in a library or with consulting the past in any other way. What is central for this type of inquiry, or these kinds of questions, is that it be pursued and conducted in a clear, rigorous, and focused fashion. Of course, it may be useful to consult the way things have been thought about, used, wrestled with in the past. It is possible one can learn from that; it's possible that one can't; and it's possible that the only thing one will learn is how confused people were in the past or how ignorant they were of important arguments and issues about justification they thought they had worked out. Clearly the past is often a useful place to begin just so that you avoid re-inventing the intellectual wheel.

Yet there are tremendous dangers in supposing that if one is a humanist, one is preoccupied or exclusively concerned with the past and a great danger that this might degenerate very rapidly into what I call an appeal to authority. One loses the significance of the critical inquiry in trying to figure out what is the correct or the most correct answer one can give to a question when one simply cites as the authority for the solution to the problem some other person's view about what was correct. I don't think human inquiry is like that at all. The thing that humanists, among others, ought to try to preserve above all else is the sense that everything that has been offered us in the past as a solution to these questions is problematic, open to the critical scrutiny of an inquiring mind, so that the question of whether we have things right can be settled here and now, without regard to what our ancestors might have thought.

I think scholarship means two very different things within the university. As I have suggested, to me the height of scholarship is a human intellect engaging carefully and systematically in conducting an inquiry that's worth undertaking. Anybody can be a scholar in that sense. Humanists are uniquely scholars only in the sense that they have the leisure, the practice, and perhaps somewhat greater ability to engage in this kind of activity for most of their vocational lives. Now there is another kind of thing that is called scholarship which is a good deal more peripheral but much more common within the university, that is, responding to set questions that happen to have come to define the things that people within a particular discipline are interested in examining. These tend very often to be what I would call very, very small, micro-problems which come pre-set by the socialization into an academic discipline, and people spend much of their time answering questions which often are only questions that are worth taking seriously because others have said in the past, "Here's something that we in the discipline think about." Some of these will be important just to carry that kind of dialogue on; others will not be except that the way universities operate and the way academic advancements certainly occur presuppose this kind of scholarship. There is no particular reason to think that we ought to become wed to this as the fundamental idea of what it is for anyone to be a scholar or to engage in scholarly inquiry. To engage in scholarship is simply to do it carefully and do it well.

What does this have to do with academic humanists and the easier question of public policy? If you all are attracted to my idea that this question of justification is built in of necessity to every question that gets defined as one relating to public policy because every question of public policy is a question of interpretive significance (that is, What's the right way to do something? What are the arguments in favor of doing it this way rather than that way? Why would it be better to do it this way rather than this way?) and if, as I have suggested, humanists are the only ones who have that as their primary concern, then it's obvious that they're the ideal persons to aid in these kinds of inquiries. To the degree to which questions of meaning, interpretation, and justification are involved as they often are in questions of public policy, that's just the kind of question that academic humanists ought to be very interested in -- like the Bakke case. What do we mean by discrimination? What do we mean by preferential treatment? In what sense are the programs that we have today preferential? These are questions of meaning. Others of justification are: What are the arguments for these programs? What are the assumptions on which they depend, assumptions about the right and the just and the decent ways to treat people? What do these arguments have to say about the appropriateness, legitimacy, desirability of programs of preferential treatment? Very often questions of public policy, so called, depend on understanding things about the world or empirical truths about the world. Though social scientists who are concerned with the relevant empirical questions also have a very appropriate role to play in these programs, I can't understand how anyone would think that humanists aren't really just the folks one would need for questions about public policy, both to understand more clearly what the questions are and how to go about thinking about them.

The question of academic humanists and public programs is harder for me to answer because I don't know what a public program is. If by public program we mean any of the sorts of questions that people who aren't presently in the university might be interested in exploring with folks who are -- questions that relate to these matters of justification or of interpretation or of meaning -- well, then, how better to involve humanists than to bring them together with other people to examine them in common. If it seems too obvious, however, let me first mention the impediments and then suggest some opportunities. I think there are four major impediments to things working better than they have been: two major impediments within the university and two major impediments without. First, this incredible dominance of what I call micro-questions within the academy -- with taking the questions, taking the set problems, to be worked on further and further with higher and greater degrees of narrowness and less concern for what the original motivation for the underlying question is -- makes the case that lots of people in their academic life are dealing with such narrow problems defined by their disciplines that they are uninteresting people. They are uninteresting to all but the relatively few other folks within the academy to whom they're talking. That's

one of the great shames of the academy. Second, the way people are socialized into academic disciplines makes it very difficult to avoid esoteric terminology. The reason why we develop esoteric terminology is not because it's terribly useful, but because it gives us enormous power. One way that one achieves power over other people is to be able to talk a language that they can't understand. That's why doctors have an esoteric language; that's why lawyers have an esoteric language; the one thing that makes it clear that the client can't understand what the lawyer is doing is that the lawyer uses terms that the client can't understand. And the existence of esoteric lanaguages within the disciplines makes it very hard for anybody outside the discipline to know what is going on. These seem to be two enormous impediments to breaking through the barriers and getting to see that people within the university are really asking very fundamental questions which pretty much exhaust all of the questions which anybody interested in asking any questions would want to ask.

Now about the two impediments outside the university, first, I have the impression that there are comparably few academic humanists who participate actively in the state humanities committees; and I think that to the degree to which there are relatively few humanists who participate, and particularly humanists whose work is at all reasonably accessible and relevant or understandable to people not thoroughly socialized into a discipline, then it just increases the chance that no one on the state committee can understand what people in the humanities are about. Without meaning to depreciate the role or importance of academic administrators within the life of the university, on the whole academic administrators are not a good substitute for academic humanists on state-based committees. They have moved away from a concern with asking these questions, either in gross or in specifics, towards other concerns, and they're not a very good intermediate source to help non-academicians understand what it is that people within the university might be doing that could be helpful and instructive and exciting. It is unproductive if people on state-based committees think that they've got a healthy component of academic humanists on their committees when most of the humanists are people who are in academic administration.

Second, the biggest disappointment to me as a member of the California committee, when I look at proposals and when I hear some of my colleagues on the committee talk, is the belief that a humanist is identical with an academician. When I see proposals come to the California council, the thing in which they're most often deficient is that sponsors think someone designated with an academic title is an academic humanist participating in the program. We do need one way or another to sort out the kinds of questions that academic humanists are apt to be interested in and able to shed some light on, and to get people on the committees and out in the community to see that it's the kinds of questions that determine whether humanists have something useful and significant and exciting to contribute.

Finally, there are some opportunities that people both within the academy and outside might better reflect upon than they have so far.

I suspect, although I may be mistaken about this, that the great majority of academic humanists who became academic humanists, who turned this into a career, did so because they were at one time or another motivated very strongly by the centrality and the importance of these large kinds of inquiries of a justificatory or interpretative sort that they saw humanists engaging in. One of the exciting things that could be fed to academic humanists as a reason for participating in public programs is a chance to recapture some of the excitement that they felt, that motivated them, to get into the university in the first place. Put aside all the worries about saying those things that their peers, who are reading the journals that they want to publish in, are going to be interested in hearing and there's a chance to get back and actually talk about and think through in a different way just those concerns that got them interested in this whole enterprise in the first place. The fact that academic humanists don't see this as an opportunity to do this kind of thing is a shame because they're cheating themselves of a lot of the excitement that brought them to the university. And it can be a challenge to them to see how much of their retrospective works and their preoccupation with certain kinds of questions can be usefully dispensed with, without at the same time relaxing the standards of rigor, care, quality, and insightfulness which made academic life perhaps different from the kinds of things which go on in the rest of the community.

One very major problem is that people's questions and concerns are often not very clear and not very clearly focused. That is, the general public often ascertains a problem, say about crime. But to say that is not to be very clear about what questions one would like to answer through one's worry about crime. One of the most useful ways to increase the quality of state programs would be to get academic humanists to try to sort out, identify different questions, and to bring them and non-humanists together in the planning of programs at a much earlier stage than is my impression typically takes place. That is, it takes a lot of work, it's hard and it's difficult, for almost anyone to try to get clear about what it is his or her interests are, to identify as precisely as one can what questions one wants to explore. If those are done long before programs are ever presented rather than two-thirds of the way through the program, the programs that result would be a lot more satisfying. And, we ought to encourage academic humanists to move a good distance away from giving formal lectures or speeches as the best way to involve themselves in the larger program because the opportunity to talk with people rather than to them will free them from some of their excessive socialization and use of esoteric language and will result in the kinds of inquiries which again will get these problems of justification and interpretation off the ground.

PART II THE PUBLIC HUMANIST

The Views from Montaigne's Tower — Michael Sherman — 23

Michael Sherman seeks to "trace the lines which connect the three open views from Montaigne's tower, taken in a metaphorical sense, with the aims and principles," of the Wisconsin Humanities program. The challenges which Montaigne so eloquently explored and which state programs should emulate are "action and contemplation; humanism and a universal curiosity nourished by his books and his experience with life; and a high regard for the life of man in all its glory and humility."

Cornet: A Dialogue Concerning the Humanities — Albert Anderson — 31

Albert Anderson envisions a dialogue between Professor Oiron and his student Cornet about "the humanities" (as defined by the Congress). Oiron accuses Cornet of being specious in his belief that "dialectic" is the thread which holds the fabric of the humanities together. Cornet sees his mentor as a cynic who fears that intellectuals will "dirty their hands" in the public arena.

The Humanities Today: The Public Function of the Private Passion — Horace Newcomb — 41

A powerful reason that some academic humanists hesitate to "go public" in non-traditional academic settings, Horace Newcomb suggests, is because the love of the subject matter -- art, music, history -- is a private passion. He also fears that the humanities are now seen as a product rather than a process. He urges us to overcome our private shyness and pride and welcome all humanists, whatever their credentials, into a public study of issues.

A Public Role for the Humanities — Milton Stern — 49

Milton Stern too speaks of the public and private function of the humanities, but maintains in the words of Emerson that "the more intimately and personally a public speaker reveals his own private self, the more universally and publically he and his audience become one." How can we make these public/private issues into a successful state humanities program? He says "If . . . we insist on projects and publics which are willing to honor the humanities and the humanist as much as we insist that the humanist get out of the ivory tower and learn to talk with the public, then I think we stand a 50-50 chance of some marvelous success."

THE VIEWS FROM MONTAIGNE'S TOWER

by

Michael Sherman *

> When at home, I turn . . . often to my library, from which I can easily overlook my whole household. There I am above the gateway, and can see below me my garden, my farmyard, my courtyard, and most parts of my house. There I turn the pages now of one book, now of another, without order and without plan, reading by snatches. Sometimes I reflect, and sometimes I compose and dictate my reflections, walking up and down. . .
>
> My library is circular in shape . . . and being rounded, it presents me with all my books at once, arranged about me on five tiers of shelves. From this room I have three open views. . . **

From the time I first met him, as a junior in college, Michel de Montaigne impressed me as one of the most fascinating individuals I had ever encountered or was likely to encounter. I met Montaigne, as we all must, though his three volumes of Essays, a form of writing he quite literally invented and named in 1580. He impressed me then, as he continues to do now that I have become more familiar with him, as a sensitive, perceptive, witty observer of the world and of himself; as--in fact--the first truly modern humanist. If ever a man took the time and trouble to explore the role of an individual in his society, Montaigne was that man; and if ever a man was meticulous in exploring the inner world of his mind, Montaigne was again that man. The Essays, first published in 1580 and revised and augmented during the rest of Montaigne's life until the publication of the first complete edition in 1595--three years after the author's death--give us a remarkably clear account of a man and the world he lived in and observed. They are a rich mine of information for historians but they are also a flawless treasure of commentaries on the human condition.

You may wonder at this panegyric on a long dead writer in the context of a conference on the Wisconsin Humanities Committee and the Public Libraries around the state. Well, there are lots of connections. First

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* Michael Sherman presented this address to the Wisconsin Humanities Conference for Librarians at the Yahara Center, October 4, 1978. (All quotations from Montaigne's Essays are taken from Michel de Montaigne, Essays (trans. and ed. J.M. Cohen, Baltimore, 1958.)

** "On Three Kinds of Relationships," Essays, III, 3.

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of all, Montaigne was a librarian's ideal patron: an avid, even voracious reader with wide interests and excellent taste. He read the works of antiquity and of his own day with equal enjoyment and understanding. He loved history, was a connoisseur of poetry, wrestled with philosophy, cautiously dabbled in theology, and occasionally looked into such scientific texts as he might find useful for the care and maintenance of his person and his great estate outside of Bordeaux. Second, Montaigne actively used his reading. His essays are liberally sprinkled with the gleanings from his reading. He always found the way to make what he read reflect on what he observed, what he thought, even what he felt--physically as well as emotionally. Third, his life and his book reveal patterns of thought which are congruent with the goals and purposes of the Wisconsin Humanities Committee. In the comments that follow I want to trace the lines which connect the three open views from Montaigne's tower, taken in a metaphorical sense, with the aims and principles of our programs. My larger purpose, however, is to explore with you the nature, practice, and goals of the humanities in general, using Montaigne as my exemplar and my instructor. Perhaps, by transforming Montaigne's off-hand comment about three open views into a metaphor, I have violated the intent of his words; but I think I have retained the spirit of his essay and I am confident that you and his ghost will forgive me.

Montaigne's biography itself suggests the pattern which is implicit in the Wisconsin Humanities Committee guidelines: a fascinating mixture of the active and contemplative lives. The son of a newly ennobled lawyer, Montaigne was given an education in the classical tradition such as few men have ever received. Later he, like his father, received training in the law. He served in the law courts of his province, which in the sixteenth century had quasi-legislative powers also, until 1570. These were terrible years in France; years of civil and religious warfare, of violence and intolerance. In 1571, at the age of 38, Montaigne left political and professional life and retired to the library in his tower which he describes in great detail for us in the essay, "On Three Kinds of Relationships" In that remarkable room he read, thought, observed, and wrote. For ten years the tower library was the center of Montaigne's life, the laboratory for his discovery of the world and of his own human existence. In 1581 Montaigne was reluctantly drawn back into politics, having been elected mayor of Bordeaux without his knowledge or permission. The religious wars were still raging throughout France and the city had run afoul of the royal administration. Montaigne was called upon to smooth relations between the municipal and provincial governments and the royal government. Despite his reluctance to leave his tower, and although his sympathies were with Henry of Navarre, a Protestant and leader of the opposition (Montaigne was a reasonably devout Catholic, I should add, and supported Henry mainly because he represented a possibility for peace and toleration); despite these misgivings, then, Montaigne did his best to serve fairly and evenhandedly. For four years he placed the interests of his community and nation above his personal preferences and tried where he could to promote a policy of pacifism and toleration in a society in no way prepared for either.

In 1585 Montaigne once again retired from public life to return to his reading and writing, which

he pursued until his early death in 1592, when he was not quite 60 years old. Not even the succession of Henry of Navarre to the throne of France as Henry IV could induce Montaigne to give up his project of investigating himself and his world through himself; and he shunned the invitation to become an advisor to the new king in order to finish the work of reading and writing which had grown to be the consuming interest of his last years.

I think I do no dishonor to Montaigne by suggesting that his life displays many of the characteristics that the Wisconsin Humanities Committee hopes to find or foster in the audience for programs it funds. The rhythm of literary and worldly education, of books and politics, of the ideal and the real, which we see in Montaigne's personal history conforms to the notion of the ideal citizen we hope to encourage in our programs. If you make the proper kinds of transformations from an aristocratic to a democratic society, with all that that implies about time and resources for study and political involvement, you will see, I hope, that the lessons Montaigne learned from his reading are the ones we wish to offer those fellow citizens who care to join us in our endeavors. One of the views from Montaigne's tower, therefore, includes a mental landscape which takes into account the value of private knowledge and the application of that knowledge to issues of public concern.

The WHC surveys a similar landscape from the left turret of the Old Red Gym (I hope you all appreciate how carefully I've molded this metaphor). We are greatly concerned that the lessons of books not be confined to libraries, or for that matter to the so-called ivory tower of academia. To this end, we have been engaged in the support of public programs which encourage a deep and broad appreciation and understanding of the humanities among out-of-school adults. In fact, until just last April it was also the case that all programs we funded had to be designed to bring the humanities into discussions of issues of broad public concern and public policy.

The confrontation of public action and private rights, the contest between social needs and individual human values, has always offered humanists an area for lively and careful discussion. The humanities have traditionally played an important role in such discussions and it is only in the last fifty to seventy-five years that they have been banished or have voluntarily disappeared from deliberations on public issues. Montaigne's example should demonstrate the extent of the loss we have suffered by not including humanistic discourse in our public debates.

The second view from Montaigne's tower was that of a humanist. That term, I know, is a vague one. It is, in fact, a term that is even argued over by many of those who call themselves humanists. I don't propose to settle all the arguments about the meaning of humanism here--even if I could--but because the word is so important for the work of the Wisconsin Humanities Committee, I would like to explore at least some dimensions of its meaning.

Controversy about the definition of humanism is not new. The second century writer Aulus Gellius noted some confusion in his own day when he tried to draw the distinction between humanism and humanitarianism. For the moment, it is useful to reassert that distinction; for what we want to get at just now is an under-

standing of what the humanities are, what kind of knowledge they represent. The distinction that Aulus Gellius made provides us with a good starting point.

> Those who have spoken Latin and have used the language correctly [he meant Cicero] do not give the word humanitas the meaning which it is commonly thought to have, namely, what the Greeks called philanthropia, signifying a kind of friendly spirit and good-feeling toward all men without distinction; but they gave to humanitas about the force of Greek word paideia, that is, what we call education and training in the good arts. Those who earnestly desire and seek after these are most highly humanized. For the pursuit of that kind of knowledge, and the training given by it have been granted to mankind alone of all the animals, and for that reason it is termed humanitas or humanity.*

The statement is not without its own difficulties, nor is it likely to be accepted by modern scholars without some argument and modification; but the attempt to isolate humanism as a kind of knowledge is quite important and is worthy of our attention.

Gellius' statement points in two directions. After making his distinction between humanism and humanitarianism, he says that the humanist is the practitioner of the good arts and that those arts are reflections of the unique capacities of human beings. Those two points, I would suggest, are good and sufficient anchors for securing an argument about what the humanities are.

The good arts to which Gellius refers are the art of language--which we may understand in the broadest sense as a consistent mode of communication, containing both rules and vocabulary; the art of analysis of ideas; the art of aesthetic analysis; and the art of historical analysis.** Confronted with a text--be it a speech, a poem, a painting, a symphony, even a dance or a ritual ceremony--the humanist typically employs some or all of these four techniques to decipher and understand the work at hand. They are unique to the humanist, I think, because they acknowledge from the start that what one has above all is a made object, the product of an individual human creativity, even where that individual hopes to speak for a whole society. Recognizing, acknowledging, and even glorifying the uniqueness of the text is first and last the hallmark of humanism. The good arts are really only techniques which allow us to penetrate the creative imagination of another human being so that the creation itself can allow its creator to speak more forcefully, directly, and clearly to us. The techniques delineated by the good arts, I am arguing, have been adopted to suit the goal of examining and paying honor to human individualism and creativity.

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* Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights (xiii, 16). Adapted from a quotation in R. S. Crane, "Shifting Definitions and Evaluations of the Humanities from the the Renaissance to the Present," in The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays Critical and Historical, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1967), I, p. 23.

** I am in debt here to R. S. Crane and his essay, "The Idea of the Humanities," op. cit., I, 3-15 (esp. 9-11).

Implicit in such study is the conviction that the made object, the fashioned idea, the conceptualized world view, in short, the creative work of human beings, is their most liberating work, the sign of freedom from mere physical necessity. In contrast with the natural or social sciences, which look for the laws governing sensible phenomena, humanists look for the signs of at least intellectual and spiritual if not necessarily social or physical autonomy. Behind the humanist's search, furthermore, is a sensitivity to the boundaries of human action and thought; the extent and limits; strengths or freedom and frailty of the human condition as expressed in works of the human imagination.

We may test my statement with the view from Montaigne's tower as we glean it from his essays. His view was a wide one, in fact, almost universal in its scope. In the Essays, Montaigne discussed every conceivable topic of interest to self-conscious human beings: birth, education, profession, death, toleration, customs, our ability to know anything beyond ourselves, clothes, coaches, the lessons of history and personal experience, the criteria for judging good poetry, the rights of kings and the duties of subjects, taxation, even recent advances in the practical sciences of agronomy and weaponry and the lack of progress in medicine. As he reflected on these and other topics he turned to his books for help, and as he read he constantly sought the common bond between himself and the authors he consulted. His knowledge--though he claimed little--was that sensible, careful knowledge of a person who has plumbed the depths of received wisdom and tested it against his own experience. He wrote in defense of Seneca and Plutarch, gave detailed criticism of Cicero, and praised in a scholarly way the poetry of his friend, La Boetie. He used his own words and the words of others to attack the exploitation and destruction of the South American Indians by Spanish conquistadores. He used all those techniques I have identified as the humanist's mental tools, and he used them for the single purpose of exploring himself, and through himself the capacities and limitations of his humanity. We may sample both Montaigne's method and his conclusions by looking at some passages from his essay, "On Books."*

Early in the essay Montaigne declares himself and his purposes in his reading:

> In books I only look for the pleasure of honest entertainment; or if I study, the only learning I look for is that which tells me how to know myself, and teaches me how to die well and to live well
>
> That is the goal toward which my horse should strain
>
> (Propertius)

Montaigne then begins his systematic review of the great and even not-so-great monuments of literature, poetry, history, and phil-

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* Essays, II, 10.

osophy. His is an irreverent view--condemning Artistotle for being too dry and boring, Plato for being too long-winded, Cicero for being too puffed up and tiresome. "They are good for the school, the bar, and the pulpit," he says "where we have leisure to doze, and are still in time a quarter of an hour later to pick up the thread of the argument." He can be lavish in his praise of some authors, however, or for whole categories of books, as in this passage on history. Here, I think, we can identify all the hallmarks of the humanist's mind at work.

> Historians give me fairer service [than Philosophers]; they are very easy and entertaining; and at the same time the man as a whole, whom it is my object to know, is more vividly and completely presented in their works than anywhere else. In them I find the diversity of his inner qualities truly portrayed, in the large and in detail, also the various traits that make up his character, and the accidents that threaten him. Now those of them that write separate lives, being concerned rather with motives than with events, more with what arises from within than with what arrives from without, suit me best of all. That is why in every way Plutarch is my man.

The third and final view I would like to suggest we can find and share with Montaigne is that of a humane person--a humanitarian, if you prefer. Now you may have thought that the quotation from Aulus Gellius I introduced earlier in this address was meant to exclude the possibility of such a view; but I should remind you that my intent was to have us avoid the confusion of two similar sounding terms whose meanings are quite different. Humanism, I have argued, is a kind of knowledge based on the assumption of the intellectual autonomy of human beings and the significance of creative individuality, and employing some analytical techniques (the good arts) in the study of artifacts, issues, and ideas which reflect those theoretical assumptions. Humanitarianism, I am now prepared to argue, is or ought to be an attitude which is a by-product of humanistic research. The sympathetic study of human creations seems to me to lead inevitably to a sympathetic attitude toward our fellow human beings. Our studies may teach us to recognize the limits of our powers and may teach us about our frailties and indeed our failings as well as our strengths and triumphs; but that combination of perceived accomplishments and failures--in which we are participants as well as observers--ought to drive us closer together rather than further apart. The humanities therefore have a powerful, if perhaps underused, function in our world; to make us see, through careful study, the elements of life, thought, and expression which bind us to each other. At the very least,

the humanities can serve as potent tools for forging attitudes of toleration and sympathy, even if they do not or cannot create in all of us the empathy or the philanthropia--indiscriminate good feeling for others--that Aulus Gellius attributed to the Greeks.

The humane view of life is everywhere evident in Montaigne's Essays, waiting to teach us, just as it emerged naturally from his own studies in literature, history and philosophy. It is most moving and most instructive as we read through the last of his essays, "On Experience."* There he not only pits his personal experience and the knowledge born of it against the wisdom of antiquity; he also challenges himself and his readers to recognize, accept, and rejoice in human limitations as the real signs of human strength. All his knowledge leads to his final message to us:

> The man who knows how to enjoy his existence as he ought has attained to an absolute perfection, like that of the gods. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the proper use of our own, and go out of ourselves because we do not know what is within us. So it is no good our mounting on stilts, for even on stilts we have to walk with our own legs; and upon the most exalted throne in the world it is still our own bottom that we sit on.
>
> The finest lives are, in my opinion, those which conform to the common and human model in an orderly way, with no marvels and no extravagances.

These, then, are the views from Montaigne's tower: action and contemplation; humanism and a universal curiosity nourished and informed by his books and his experience with life; and a high regard for the life of man in all its glory and humility.

Few of us, no matter how sincerely we share Montaigne's views, can share his eloquence. Few of us can expect to have the effect he has had on his millions of readers since the sixteenth century. But we can at least take up the challenges that his life and his book offer us, and we can try to share with others the view he describes for us. We at the Committee have a tower of sorts, and we are trying to use it to transmit Montaigne's message. You are in the enviable position of holding in your collections of books the sources of wisdom that Montaigne relied on. Through you and your institutions others may be able to follow the route that Montaigne explored. We earnestly invite you to join us in our effort to take a closer look at those views and to offer them, with our help, to your patrons and fellow citizens.

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* Essays, III, 3.

CORNET: A DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE HUMANITIES

by

Albert A. Anderson

SCENE: A sidewalk on Pennsylvania Avenue, north of the White House.

Professor Oiron! What are you doing in Washington?

Well, Cornet, I haven't seen you in years.

No, but this is the last place I would expect to run into you. Surely you are not here for a tour of the White House.

I'm in town for the philosophy convention, but just now I came from the Renwick Gallery. Have you seen their display of handmade musical instruments?

No. I really don't have much time for museums these days. I heard about the exhibit, but I haven't seen it myself.

I'm on my way to the Hirschhorn now. Why don't you come along?

ALBERT A. ANDERSON is a professor in the Department of Philosophy, Clark University and a member of the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy. This essay was written especially for Federation Reports (Vol. 2, No. 7, May, 1979) at the request of the editors. Professor Anderson participated in a particularly invigorating discussion after the Humanities Roundtable at the 1978 National Meeting of the State Humanities Programs in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He had very effectively prodded the group, much as Oiron does in the dialogue. In response to a challenge, Anderson answered that he does indeed believe that the problem of definition is of first importance for the state humanities programs, that it is not merely an exercise. A long-time student of Plato's philosophy, Anderson found the dialogue form the natural way to reveal his argument. In a letter, he wrote "On a topic such as the public role of the humanities I simply cannot make an easy choice between the position of Oiron and that of Cornet. I am either in the middle or in search of some other alternative. My hope is that the reader will find this format even more 'provocative' than an open letter because he, too, will have a hard time choosing."

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I'd love to join you, but I have an appointment with the President at two o'clock.

Good Heavens! You must have become famous. I heard that you had joined the administration, but I thought it was at your university.

It is. But I am part of a team selected to speak with him on behalf of the humanities. We have met with various members of Congress during the past several months, and now we are seeking support from the President.

Support for what?

For a White House conference on the Humanities.

Why?

Why?

Yes, why?

Surely, Oiron, you don't need to be convinced about the importance of focusing public attention upon the humanities. You know that the humanities are in a state of crisis. A White House conference will make people more aware of the value of humanistic education. But I don't need to tell you this, since you teach humanities.

I teach philosophy, Cornet. I have never taught anything called "humanities."

Don't quibble, Oiron. Philosophy is one of the humanities. But the important thing is not what it is called but whether it will continue to be taught in this country over the next several years. The humanities are suffering throughout the nation. Our hope is that we can convince the American people to restore the humanities to their proper place in our culture.

Perhaps the best way to do that would be to get back to the classroom where you belong.

I could do that. I have tenure in my department. But there is an increasing number of young faculty in the humanities who don't have that option. I feel an obligation to help them and to serve the cause of humanistic education as well.

I share your ideals, Cornet, but I am skeptical about being able to do that in Washington or in the campus administration building. They don't really care much about ideas in such places.

Yes they do, but they believe that ideas should be embodied in the world and make a difference in people's lives. My goal is to make sure that some of those ideas come from the area of the humanities. For that we need more resources.

If you are serious about ideas, then your first obligation is to be clear about them. I don't mean to quibble, but I just do not know what you mean by "humanistic education." It seems to be a piece of rhetoric, not a proper concept. What would you do if the President should ask you to tell him what you mean by "the humanities?"

I would begin by reminding him of the Congressional definition formulated when the National Endowment for the Humanities was established.

And what is that?

"The humanities include, but are not limited to: history, philosophy, languages, linguistics, literature, archaeology, jurisprudence, history and criticism of the arts, ethics,

comparative religion, and those aspects of the social sciences employing historical or philosophical approaches."

I see your memory is as good as ever, Cornet. I recall that when you were a student you would quote whole paragraphs from memory and astound us all. But I have just one small question about this definition.

You always have a question, but it is seldom a small one. But please ask it, Oiron. It will be good practice for me.

What I don't understand is what unites all those disciplines that you claim are part of one single domain. I suspect that there is no common element but that this is just a collection to which you affix the name "humanities."

Oh, no. The label is not arbitrary. There is a common core which all the humanities share.

I hope you are right, Cornet. The President might wonder about the justification for a conference dealing with such a diverse group of activities. To a neutral observer it would seem that there is a vast difference between archaeology and ethics.

It does seem that way, but we face the same problem with any concept, don't we? In common discourse it appears to be vague and imprecise. I think that Congress simply provided a common-sense version of something which a philosopher could articulate more clearly.

Come, now, Cornet! You don't really believe that Congress really knew what it was doing when it came up with that definition. The National Science Foundation was already in existence and there was pressure from non-scientists to spread the money around a bit. It was simply a political definition: they tried to cover what was not included in the sciences.

You are as cynical as ever, my friend. But, no, I don't think the move was just political any more than it was arbitrary. The National Endowment for the Humanities serves a group of activities which are bound together by a common feature. I agree that the Congressional definition lacks philosophical precision, but that is to be expected considering the context of the language. Perhaps I can explain my position to you in terms of Kantian philosophy. I recall from my days as your student that you have great respect for his logical clarity.

I don't recall Kant ever using the term "humanities."

I wish to make an analogy with Kant's argument concerning the relationship between common sense in questions of morality and the philosophical formulation of those ideas. Common sense contains the germ of principles which can be articulated and defended philosophically. You will find this position stated in the first section of the <u>*Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*</u>.

I'm sure you could quote it to me, but just refresh my memory. What is his argument?

It was not really an argument. He simple points out that what is morally demanded of an individual must be able to become a universal law. Common reason formulates this initially as the "golden rule," but

when it is developed philosophically it becomes Kant's "categorical imperative." If there is no universal law, there is no duty and therefore no morality. But common sense knows how absurd it would be if there were no moral imperatives holding the human community together, even though it could not give the rational justification for such imperatives.

What does this have to do with the humanities?

The Congressional definition of the humanities is more like the "golden rule" in the analogy. There is a common character shared by all the disciplines listed by Congress, but it would require critical analysis to reveal it. As Kant points out, the philosopher would not need to teach anything new to show this common feature but would simply follow the Socratic method of directing attention to a principle which is already an implicit grasp of the moral principle. One can recognize and list the humanities without knowing the rational justification for claiming that they have a common essence.

Well, then, if this knowledge is so common, why is it necessary to spend all that tax money on the humanities? If you really believe this, then you should tell the President that we can save millions of dollars each year by abolishing the National Endowment for the Humanities.

You old fox! You always did delight in baiting me! But seriously, Oiron, you know Kant's reply as well as I do. We need philosophy just because common sense is unable to defend itself, even if it knows what is true and good.

"Innocence is indeed a glorious thing; only, on the other hand, it is very sad that it cannot well maintain itself, and is easily seduced." I have taught that book for the past twenty-five years, so even my weak mind can call up a quote now and then. But even if I admit that Kant is right about moral philosophy, I am still not convinced that you are right about the integrity of the humanities. I still suspect that Congress acted for political reasons, not conceptual ones. Socrates himself would have a hard time getting a noble principle out of a bunch of lawyers. There is a difference between common wisdom and sophistry, and the sophists usually appear when it is time to divide up the money.

It is not only lawyers who have a stake in this matter. There are many college professors who believe that the humanities can make a difference in public life.

I know. They have been lured out of the classrooms and libraries by federal money. Do you really think it is wise for academics to meddle in politics? That invites the politicians to interfere in the affairs of the university. Besides, you know what happens when intellectuals take to the streets.

I know what happened to Socrates and Martin Luther King. But I also know how arid and barren philosophy becomes when it is removed from the mainstream of life. The professors I have in mind believe that what people think makes a profound difference in what they do. Therefore they try to break down the walls that separate the humanistic disciplines. They refuse to

divorce the humanities from the sciences and the arts. They seek to integrate the life of the mind with the practical and productive lives of ordinary people.

Those are beautiful thoughts, Cornet. But even though I admire your good intentions, I am not seduced by your rhetoric. Good intentions do not serve as an account of the principle of unity among the humanities. Can you answer my question or not? What do the humanities have in common?

Dialectic.

Dialectic?

Yes. I think that what the humanities have in common is the pursuit of reasons that justify whatever ideas, concepts, theories, interpretations, or evaluations are offered about any matter of human concern. This distinguishes the thinking of the humanist from that of the scientist on one side and the artist on the other.

And you think you can find all that in the Congressional definition?

Even if the authors of the legislation which defined the humanities for public support did not know it explicitly, this is the principle to which they implicitly appealed. I realize that calling it by the name "dialectic" would cause more confusion than clarity. If the term were used in Congress it would create alarm because it would be connected with "dialectical materialism" or some other such notion. But I know that you are a careful reader of Plato, Oiron, and you will know what I mean when I say that I use the term in that sense. By "dialectic" I mean the process which Plato displays so magnificently in his dialogues. I can think of no better way of indicating what I take to be essential to the humanities.

I fear that there are few people who will understand what you mean, Cornet. I find that hardly anybody reads Plato as I do.

Well, you have "corrupted" me, Oiron.

Please don't spread that around, Cornet. You'll get me into trouble for sure! But since I do have an idea of why you appeal to Plato, perhaps you can tell me how the "reasons" given by the humanist differ from those of the scientist. It would seem that both are concerned with giving reasons.

As I recall we spent an entire semester on this very question in your philosophy of science course, so there is no hope of my doing justice to it now. But I think it makes sense to distinguish between <u>explanation</u> and dialectic.

What's the difference?

Ernest Nagel, in <u>The Structure of Science</u>, says that the aim of science is "to provide systematic and responsibly supported explanations." These explanations seek to answer the question why, but this is ambiguous because each of the sciences has its own subject matter, its own assumptions and presuppositions, and its own procedures. Dialectic, on the other hand, seeks to do away with the ambiguity. Instead of making and confirming hypotheses, dialectic seeks to do away with hypotheses. It seeks what Plato

called the "first principle." In other words, it will settle for nothing less than the truth!

Do you mean to say that science is not concerned with truth?

I would say that when science becomes really serious about truth it also becomes philosophy. The kinds of questions it deals with in that case are philosophical questions. Thinkers like Einstein, Darwin, Heisenberg, and Weber join the humanities when they question the very foundations of their scientific explanations. When basic presuppositions are thrown into doubt, scientists become philosophers and engage in dialectic. But usually the scientist is devoted to formulating and testing hypotheses, to explaining some range of phenomena in causal terms. When he does that he is doing something essentially different from the humanist.

I am willing to admit that philosophers are dialectical in that sense, but surely you don't claim that all of those disciplines listed in the Congressional definition employ dialectic.

That is exactly what I think.

What about jurisprudence? Do you think that lawyers are concerned about the truth? Is that what you learned from Watergate?

I know well that legal education is often just a matter of mastering techniques and memorizing information, without regard for what is true or good. But there is a humanistic dimension of jurisprudence, and that is intimately connected with notions such as justice, right, and truth. When I think of Watergate I remember not only Nixon, Dean, and Mitchell, but I also recall Archibald Cox. The best members of the legal profession care about ultimate values and are willing to act on the basis of those values. Jurisprudence is humanistic when it applies dialectic to the fundamental questions which are implicit in all fields of inquiry.

What about languages? What possible application could there be for dialectic in the study of language? Can you justify the adjective endings in German or give a rational explanation for the French verb?

No, but there are similar questions which linguists explore that show just how normative languages can be. Contemporary philosophy has not been indifferent to such matters, Oiron. Of course it is possible to ignore such issues and simply memorize speech patterns. That's how the Army teaches languages at Monterey. But language is deeply embedded in cultural contexts and shapes human consciousness in profound ways. Even if one cannot justify the gender of German nouns, the study of language might include the normative dimensions of a concept like Bildung.

Well, Cornet, I think you have done a masterful job of turning everything into philosophy. Ethics, jurisprudence, history, criticism, even linguistics all have their philosophical aspects, and calling them dialectical reveals the fact that they are all philosophical in their heart, even though they have been hanging around with the social scientists. But I think that some of the disciplines you call humanistic will resist even your rhetorical powers.

If I tend to see everything philosophically, Oiron, you're the one who is responsible. But which of the disciplines do you think is unconcerned with dialectic?

Do you think for a moment that the people in literature or in art criticism would characterize what they do as "dialectic?"

They would surely find the term difficult to accept, but I think that their activity is basically harmonious with what Plato was doing in the dialogues!

Plato was doing philosophy, and that is fundamentally different from poetry!

I know that there is an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, but I think that it is basically a "lover's quarrel" and that it would be wrong for them to get a divorce.

Whatever you think, Cornet, the people in literature, art history, and criticism tend to object violently to searching for "the truth" or justifying something which is mysterious. If you ask for reasons, what you will get is Pascal's response: "Le coeur a ses raisons que le raison ne connait point." For example, consider e. e. cummings' Norton Lectures at Harvard. He made it quite clear not only that he considers art and religion to be humanistic but that their humanistic content would be destroyed by rational explanations.

Now you raise the problem of distinguishing the humanities from the arts, and I think we spent two semesters on that one! But I will say that I think the arts and humanities are distinct in their basic nature, though it is hard for them to live apart. Congress has reflected that difference in setting up two separate endowments, one for the arts and one for the humanities.

Yes, politics not only makes strange bedfellows, it also makes Procrustean beds! Congress knows that it is politically expedient to grease the palms of the artists as well.

There is a deeper reason. The principle unifying the arts is essentially different from that which integrates the humanities.

And what do you think that is?

The arts are a function of the creative imagination. The purpose of the National Endowment for the Arts is to support the practice of the arts. That means that it is the creation and performance of art which they foster, whereas the humanities are concerned with appreciation, evaluation, and interpretation of the arts. Imagination is required for the humanistic study of the arts, and that is why the arts and the humanities are so difficult to separate. But the humanities employ dialectic and the creative arts are not concerned with rational justification of first principles.

How can an artist avoid criticizing his own work?

He can't. But there is a clear distinction between the creative act and the critical act. The artist, as a whole person, engages in other activities than the one that makes his thinking unique. Logical dissection of his uniqueness need not destroy the living

being who also explains, justifies, and does a thousand other things. And I think that these various ways of thinking tend to presuppose each other. Criticism presupposes creative imagination. When an artist creates he must decide whether to keep the product or destroy it and try again. The literary scholar would have nothing to examine without the prior act of the creative imagination. Art historians must explain before they can engage in dialectic.

Then it seems you are arguing for uniting rather than separating the three endowments.

If Congress wishes to assure that the arts, the humanities, and the sciences will all flourish in our culture, it must legislate according to the distinctions which make each activity unique. I think they have done a splendid job of doing that, whether or not they can defend their actions philosophically. Of course it is inevitable that these distinctions will become blurred and fuzzy in actual practice.

I think that the fuzziness is in your definition, not in its practical application. When e. e. cummings lectured at Harvard (or, as he said, nonlectured), is he a humanist or a poet? If he were alive, where should he go for grant money, to the NEH or the NEA?

I suspect they would both be happy to support <u>him</u>!

You are evading my point. There are many teachers and students of criticism, the arts, and religion who agree with cummings in refusing to remove the mystery from their subject matter. If you demand that they engage in dialectic, you interfere with their way of exploring "humanistic" subject matter.

I don't "demand" that they do dialectic, I believe they are doing it whether they think so or not. Is the claim of mystery at the beginning of their reflection or at the end? If it is at the end, then they have participated in dialectical thinking. If it is at the beginning, then I don't think they have met the demands of the intellectual process.

I know that is what you think. And I agree with you. But the reason we agree is that we have already committed ourselves to the kind of rational inquiry I call philosophy and you call dialectic. But the other "humanists," the ones who do not fit your category, are eliminated from receiving funds (at least if your definition is followed). I understand that political expediency demands that there be some criteria for determining who gets the money and who does not. Many of the people who have lived and worked across the street from where we are standing have <u>rationalized</u> their actions and decisions in terms of political expediency. But I agonize when representatives of the academy use that excuse. If intellectuals cannot keep their thinking straight, who can?

Oiron, I really don't understand your charge of rationalization.

You force teachers of literature into categories which simply don't apply. That is sophistry. Many of them self-consciously refuse to engage in dialectic, or whatever else you call philosophy. They do so before (or instead of)

reflecting rationally. Of course you could simply accept the Congressional definition as a political necessity, but that would undermine your intellectual desire to find a common core among what you call the humanities. My charge remains what it was at the outset: you are trying to find a rational justification for something that is either arbitrary or pragmatic.

I suspect that what you really fear is that intellectuals might dirty their hands!

No, my fear is that you will soon be unable to make the real distinctions that lie at the root of human life. You were right about my respect for Kant's ability to make logical distinctions. He was able to do that because he stayed in his study where he belonged and did not try to mix philosophy and politics. Socrates learned as a young man that engaging in politics and holding onto moral principles leads to an early demise. He tells us in the Apology that he got out of politics for that reason. Kant shows us the absolute distinction between a categorical imperative and a hypothetical imperative, but he would not last long if he tried to apply his moral thinking to a political life. You mentioned Archibald Cox. He was fired in Washington, and wound up back at Harvard just because he refused to compromise his integrity.

You delude yourself, Oiron, if you think that the university provides refuge from politics. In fact, I often find campus politics to be more vicious and dirty than what goes on in Washington!

I know that. That's why I stay away from campus politics as well. I have not served on a committee or held an administrative appointment for ten years. I long ago decided to mind my own business which is in the classroom, the library, and my study.

I have never known anyone superior to you in the classroom, Oiron, so I hope that the administration does not cut your budget to support the business school.

They have already done that. We lost a tenured member of my department because of "financial exigency," and our library budget has been cut in half. I think the administration acted unwisely, even unjustly. But I am not about to give up philosophy and become a politician as a result. That would be even more unwise.

Oiron, I hate to say it but it is almost two o'clock. I would love to talk about his issue further, but I must go now or be late for my appointment.

Then we must go our separate ways, Cornet. You bear the flag for the humanities, and I shall look for beauty in the Hirschhorn.

THE HUMANITIES TODAY:

THE PUBLIC FUNCTION OF THE PRIVATE PASSION

by

Horace Newcomb

I would like to begin with two stories that illustrate, in part, the topic of the public function of the humanities. The stories come from my high school days when, like many of us, I experienced the first stirrings of what was to become my professional involvement with the humanities. The first is not really a story, but rather a small description.

When I first found out that I cared for poems I discovered in my high school library a small shelf of delicate, thin volumes. Among them were the plays and poems of Shakespeare. Lovely things, bound in red leather, somewhat worn. The paper was thick and marked. These were the perfect aesthetic objects for a budding aesthete. I found, happily, that with some effort I could untangle words, the marvellously involved sentences and read, more often than anything else, the sonnets. But what is most important in this experience is the memory, not of what I did with the words, but of what I did with the book. I carried it for weeks, renewing it when necessary, tucked into the back pocket of my blue jeans, carefully exposed so that anyone who really wanted, needed, or should know about my sensitivity, could see it and read the title.

The second story is much less confessional. It concerns a group of high school students with whom I did my running, for I was not the only sonnet reader and writer, musician,

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or humorist. Our senior class men's home room was divided by two imaginary lines. On one side we, the humanists (broadly defined), sat together. On another side sat the group who wore leather sleeved athletic jackets. In a line across the back of the room sat the hoods, leather jackets of a different sort, greasy curls hanging into the middle of their foreheads. There were a few cross-overs, jocks who played in the band during the off seasons, or who read books, or who could understand our somewhat cynical jokes. There was little real tension among the groups in that room. There was considerably more with the basketball coach who was the home room supervisor. Our jokes mocked many of his values and when we became too obvious he would call one of us to the front of the room and swat us with a piece of rope or a small boat paddle.

I suggest that these two stories offer models of our problematic question, What is the public function of the humanities? I'll return to them later and try to explain the analogies, but before doing that I think it is necessary to understand why there is a "problem" in the first place.

For me, the problematic aspects of the humanities are rooted in the deeply private nature of our personal experience with what have traditionally been known as humanistic materials and objects of study. The very experiential aspects of reading, or listening to music, or closely observing paintings, or sorting out historical sources, are intensely private. We shut out much of the life that surrounds us when we enter these worlds. And we do "enter" them. We move among the characters of the novel. We are in and out of their minds. We "identify" with them, though no one, so far as I know, has adequately defined or described what that deep and complex process involves.

One of the chief attractions of this experience, for me, has to do with the carefully limited nature of these worlds of literature, art, music, film, or history. The worlds are contained. And yet that very boundedness is what causes us such anguish in dealing with the private worlds.

Consider our sadness when they end. We must close the book. We must lift the arm from the record because the dry, thumping, annoying, scratch calls us back to other things. The guard interrupts our reverie before the painting and asks that we leave the closing museum. Are not some of our loneliest moments, ironically, those in which we shut the book and look up to discover the face of another person across the library table? We find ourselves suddenly part of an "audience," forced to rise with these others and applaud the orchestra. The door of the museum shuts behind us and we must plunge into the street crowds.

I think that we love these worlds so much <u>because</u> of the intensely private nature they hold out for us. We enter them and come to know their characters and characteristics as friends, better than we know our "real" friends. We know their motivations, their weakness, their pride, all the things that our friends in life will try to hide from us for so long. Or we know so well the structures of the symphony. It is so precise. We soon come to predict, rather than to anticipate. The rules are ours. We have appropriated something of the composer's experience. The painting opens up to us, and

while living its line and color and mass we think perhaps that we can see beyond it, can sense what the artist found on the other side of this glowing cathedral but did not choose to paint. For the philosopher the privacy comes from cracking the code, from being able to understand these somewhat arcane languages. He can now participate with the masters in following the thought that somewhere has changed from the abstruse to the obvious.

Is it any wonder that many of us begin, soon after our initial experiences with these worlds, to plan to spend our lives with them? We will somehow make it possible to keep the books open, to study so intensely that we must continually find a reason to go back to the preferred text, the works of the most loved author, the period that now lives more glowingly than our own. We will find a way to stay in the museum after the public doors are closed. Now the guard taps lightly at the door of our office rather than on our shoulder, and asks if everything is alright. We shuffle through the portfolio of prints and say, "Yes. I'll be working late tonight." We sit with our world circumscribed by the score in front of us and the headphones over our ears and write our musicological analyses. The "world" is literally drowned.

For these pleasures we endure the agonies of graduate study. We suffer through examinations. We earn the card. We become members of the club. Choose your metaphor.

At this point, however, we find ourselves called upon to perform publicly, albeit in very traditional ways. In this manner we share what we have come to call our own, our specialty, our field. And the process begins again. Perhaps we notice a young man with a book of sonnets placed with such casual care in his back pocket, or with a copy of Nausea carelessly placed on the top of his book stack. We know how to look for those who can experience the private passion as we have. And we know, too, how to share something of that passion with others who will not mold themselves in our image. One of our greatest public functions has been to maintain the tradition of our special interests as part of general education. We see to it that almost everyone comes into some contact with the humanities. Sometimes we set out to convert. At others we are content to design the survey so that the uninterested student has the necessary basic introduction.

And we must also demonstrate to our peers that we can say something beyond that introductory level. The requirement that every humanist be a publishing scholar may be adapted from the scientific fields and is often more of a problem in our areas of study. In some cases there is undue pressure to speak publicly too soon. For others the teaching function may be sufficient and may preclude any desire to publish. But for some of us the desire and the opportunity are there and this is one of our major public functions. We are somewhat chagrined by the fact that only others like us will read what we write, but we can console ourselves that they are the only ones who would truly understand. We may also be chastened by the fact that what we write about is often so much more important, indeed, so much better written, than what we produce. I believe firmly that one problem with the requirement for publication is that it forces many humanists, particularly literary

scholars, philosophers, and historians, into competition with the texts which are their subjects. We are silent because it would be desecration to place our interpretation beside the original.

But even as we work out these problems, elaborate and establish our courses, resolve for ourselves the dilemma of research and publication, a wrench is thrown into the system. We are asked to go public in other ways, ways that are strange to us and are not part of our long traditions. We are asked to pronounce on issues that affect lives in a direct manner, far different from the "effects" of aesthetic experience or knowledge of historical fact. We are asked to involve ourselves in discussions of "public policy," to "bring" the humanities to the general adult audience. The state humanities committees tell us that money is here, waiting for us. But to use it we must think in terms of speaking or performing or producing outside our classrooms and on issues perhaps outside our conventional expertise, our training, our "field."

We know, of course, that our great texts and the lessons of history can speak to all issues, know that Moby Dick can be cited in discussions of environmental policy, or that Walden can be tugged into discussions of educational needs. Emerson was willing to pronounce on almost everything and many of our most cherished artifacts deal with the distressing fringes of human experience. Still, somehow, we feel that we are stretching it a bit with these attempts. We notice that the audiences don't appear to be moved by our analysis of another set of evidential poems or novels. Indeed, sometimes the audiences don't appear at all. Better then to leave such matters to technically trained film makers or to the real students of social issues. We can sit in on the proposal writing, mark a few weak transitions, fill out the bibliography, serve, in short, the obligatory role of the academic humanist. A redundancy we are quick to point out. What other sort of humanist is there?

These strange dilemmas and their attendant ennui come precisely at one of our most awkward moments. Jobs are scarce. Tenure seems to recede into the distance with light-like swiftness. Publishers are uninterested in our small but insightful studies, yet publication seems so necessary. How can we even get to the point of producing the small study when we must teach fewer and fewer majors, more and more service courses for students interested only, it seems, in their own job security and not at all in the texts and problems that fascinate us. The beauty that we can show them no longer appeals. We are called on to be public humanists just at the time when we are being jerked out of the supportive private worlds of literature, art, music, philosophy, history, and language.

This is referred to as "a crisis in the humanities." Often it is attributed to increasing professionalization. Some say that we should not respond and argue that we cannot or should not be public. It is less than genteel to fight for grants, to battle scientists for appropriations, to establish mean bureaucracies of our own (disguised as Endowments) in order to survive in Washington. In the view of these critics our perspective should be the long one. What can we possibly have to say to immediate issues such as environmental policy or public fraud. Do not charge us with failures. The people who harm us did not take

"our" humanities seriously, did not learn the lessons of the great texts. Business majors. Scientists. Pitiful sociologists, language so filled with jargon. How could we really ever expect them to develop appropriate hermeneutic strategies sufficient to explain the "aesthetic power" of Barth's self reflexive fictions. And once again we hold with clean hands to our staples--truth, beauty, honor, excellence, tradition.

But I assert that the crisis is not in an increasing professionalization. Our fear of dirty hands marks a deeper failure. Indeed, how can we deny that we have always been highly professionalized, complete with codes of conduct, restraints, sanctions.

New opportunities should not frighten or offend us. We should not sneer at grant grubbers while we complain of too little research support. There is no harm in jargon--theirs or ours--so long as it is used as it often is, to create more precise models and metaphors. We should not shy from being called upon to contribute in new ways to strange areas so long as we have something to contribute.

And there, I fear, is the true heart of a real crisis. Our problem is not that we have become a modern profession in a time of professional crises. Our problem is the model of professionalism we've chosen. In that model the humanities become a product when in fact the humanities must always be seen as a process. The humanities offer us a way to think the world, a way of asking questions rather than a ready made set of answers. We use the humanities to mark and mold human experience.

I compare the incorrect "product" model of the humanities with my first high school story. The book was mine. It was contained in my pocket. It was presented to the world at my will and for my purposes alone. It was there for display and I, the budding humanist, controlled that display. This is a strong model. We call on ideas of the "text" to support it. The text is seen as a finished, polished, closed work, frozen like Keats' figures on the urn. Or we define a canon. We speak of touchstones. Our mastered reading lists, our comprehensive exams, our finals, all are products, the things that define the humanities. The things are discussed in our papers, readable only by others who know the things well enough to check our basic assumptions, our allusions, and comparisons. We desire to hand these "things" to our students and assume in doing so that knowledge of them is sufficient to humanize.

The humanistic enterprise, however, the process, must be applicable anywhere, to any text, any issue. We must be able to turn our skills of interpretation, analysis, criticism, definition, and historical comparison on any set of artifacts or assumptions. There we must probe the values expressed or assumed, for where humans move and act and make policy, values are present. Choices are the symbols of belief. Where choices have been or must be made the humanistic process must be called into action. With this model we give ourselves and our students tools as well as things.

Surely there is nothing heretical here, nor is there much that is new. I certainly do not demean the traditional objects of our

study, or the sense of tradition itself. We must have some body of shared knowledge and a sense of its history. But we must also be aware that humans have made the choices that go into the selection of our canon. We should never be afraid to be self conscious about the symbols of our own belief, to turn our analytical skills upon our own assumptions. In doing so it should be clear that an even more responsible view of "text" serves as the basis for this model of the humanities as well. In the creation of the text, the artist, the supreme humanist, is involved in process, in working out the world. Remaking. Shaping. And if we examine closely our private, passionate concerns we must admit that it is not a frozen passion. We, too, are in process, reliving the choices of that artist. The process is renewed with every reading, every performance. Yet--how marvelous--every reading is sufficiently common that we can share it with other readers just as the artist's experience is sufficiently shared to be common with us.

The terrible thing about turning texts into products, about attempts to preserve them in stasis, or to hand them whole and unmarred to students, is that it is thievery. The text is not ours to give. We can no more appropriate the text than its creator could own the world in imitating it.

My second story, that of the divided home room, illustrates this important model of the humanities. We were constantly turning the sharp and naively cynical humanistic eye on the athletes, the coach, the school. But we were knocked back, chastened, confronted with other values. We gave and took and all the groups were bettered by it. We learned in fact to be more humane in the process. There was no pride in our actions other than the haughtiness of adolescence.

That is the real lesson here. In turning the humanities into products we created a strong base for excessive pride, the most anti-humanistic of deadly sins. We scoff at other disciplines. We dismiss people working at all levels in business, or politics. We try to "save" the children of the working class by giving them our lovely texts.

But I assert that just as we cannot own the greatest artifacts of the humanistic experience, neither can we own the name of humanist. The sociologist who labors to define our failures of social policy, the politician burdened with decision making and choice, the bureaucrat who seeks to aid the bewildered client, the amateur genealogist--these are true humanists. They, too, engage in the process of definition, interpretation, analysis, criticism, and historical comparison. They translate belief and value into choice and action. They do it not merely to flex intellectual muscles, but to achieve some sense of wholeness, some personal living touch of our great goals which are and will continue to be, truth, beauty, honor, excellence.

A colleague tells the story of meeting a chemist in the halls of his university. The chemist carried in his hands a large plastic model of a particular molecular structure. Thinking to be the wry and ironic humanist my friend asked, "Is that real?" "No," said the chemist, "It's a metaphor," and went about his business which was, I suggest, the business of all humanists.

I welcome them all to the camp and say that often they have been more involved in doing the humanities than I have. We dare not let our pride exclude them. Among them our task--because of our private commitments to a body of knowledge as well as to the process--is to be the best, and the most humble exemplars of the humanistic enterprise.

Because of that we should feel strong these days, strong enough to apply the humanistic process at will. We should not wait to be called as "mere" consultants, but should write our own proposals for the study of land use, urban planning, the problems of aging, or child abuse. The public function of the professional humanist is to turn the process on every expression of human values. Here our mastery and love of content plays hand in hand with our training in process. We can see the consequences of human actions and choices in the working out of our great texts. Our consequent sense of humility should humble those who intend to invent the world anew, as clean and pure this time as a neatly typed project proposal. Our lessons for them are great ones. The humanities certainly cannot save the world. Our knowledge should indicate quickly to us that that is not even the appropriate goal. Conceived as process rather than as product, however, the humanities may at least aid the world in beginning to be saved, a "process" that never ends.

A PUBLIC ROLE FOR THE HUMANITIES

by

Milton Stern

We have become a nation with a common twentieth century culture whose regional distinctions are a matter for exploitation by commerce and folklorists rather than a matter of real difference in morality, values, or experience. Consequently, because we really are talking about the relationship of our state-based programs to our national society, I find that my perspectives from either Massachusetts Bay or from your sister organization the Connecticut Humanities Council, are really no different from your own. We share the same America. Although I cannot come to you with unique perspectives and clear solutions, perhaps in sharing with you a recognition of our mutual experience I might be able to help, in however small a way, to define our common perspectives.

I am neither foolish nor fatuous enough to belabor you with the profound and lasting ways in which literature is applicable to every aspect of human experience, for I think that any thoughtful person interested in the humanities already is aware of them in diverse and various ways. I take them for granted, and you in this audience most certainly do not need me to remind you of what you take for granted as well.

Rather, we are mutually confronted by the ways in which the study of literature is at one or two removes from the political tactics and strategies that always lie at the heart of immediate and specific public issues and in this confrontation is the problem of the application not of literature alone but of almost all humanistic study in a public arena filled with people who seek immediately practical relief. We humanists tend to shrink from the charge of the state-based programs because we fear scorn in the arena. We fear impatience and patronizing snickers. We fear being exposed as hothouse plants luxuriously insulated against, naive about, and ignorant of the immediacy and press of public realities. And after almost six years of experience in the establishment and operation of the Connecticut Humanities Council, I find still unresolved--perhaps they are unresolvable--the opposing implications of the two terms of the state-based programs with which the humanist struggles: "the humanities" and "public policy."

We are all familiar with the assertion of William Butler Yeats that out of our arguments with others we make politics

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but that out of our arguments with ourselves we make poetry. The idea is so often quoted, and it has the advantage of being so totally *neat*, that one thinks of it an as unassailable truth. But I think it is not total. It leaves out too much. And if it is a total truth, then we might as well go home, for Yeat's assertion marks a separation, a division, between politics and poetry in a very crucial way: it is a division between what is public and what is private, a division I have come increasingly to wonder about.

Robert Frost marked the same distinction between the internal and the external worlds in one of his well known poems, "Tree at My Window:"

Tree at my window, window tree,
My sash is lowered when night
comes on;
But let there never be curtain
drawn
Between you and me.

Vague dream-head lifted out
of the ground.
And thing next most diffuse
to cloud,
Not all your light tongues
talking aloud
Could be profound.

But tree, I have seen you
taken and tossed,
And if you have seen me
when I slept,
You have seen me when I
was taken and swept
And all but lost.

That day she put our
heads together,
Fate had her imagination
about her,
Your head so much concerned
with outer,
Mine with inner, weather.

And the federal government joined Yeats and Frost--surely unsuspectingly --in considering this distinction when it created the state-based programs predicated upon the academic humanities and *public* issues.

What, I wonder, are *private* issues? Surely we have come to learn that private issues are not necessarily personal issues, for among the project applications funded by Viginia and Connecticut--and, I am sure, California and Louisiana and Montana and Ohio--are issues such as marriage and divorce, rape, homosexual practices, sex and sexuality, fear, loneliness, religious belief, and insufficient incomes. What could be more intimate, more *inner* than such subjects? If, like the character Eugene Henderson, created by Saul Bellow, I cry, "My parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul!" do I not name a public issue in every instance?

I think that Ralph Waldo Emerson was right: the more intimately and personally a public speaker reveals his own private self, the more universally and publically he and his audience become one. Were I to attempt the experiment, you might become offended, you might snicker, you might squirm, you might walk out, you might applaud, but you would not be untouched. No, I think that in substance and essence, perhaps there really is no such thing as a private issue. Out of our arguments with ourselves we make not only our poetry but our psychology and our ideologies; out of our arguments with others we make not only our politics but secret investigations into our own souls.

Yeats and Frost, in the puissant rightness of their language, ensnare us too successfully, and I wish to enter a modification of their distinctions between inner and outer, private and public, poetry and politics. I think that what they say applies not to the substantive but to the methodological. If, substantively, there are no private issues, in the methods of our response to universal states and issues, there are private, inner worlds. My worries or joys at any given moment might not be yours; my internal monologue, my hearing my own voice with my own throat, as Andre Malraux put it, might not be yours; my illuminations and insights and ecstasies and griefs might not be yours. The obvious need not be extended here: our separate experiences and our separate growth are privately different from one another's. But the nature of the states and issues that compose those experiences and growth are common to us all, are substantively public, like death.

In sum, although the substance of poetry and politics is one, the methods of poetry and politics are not. Literature especially, and the core humanities generally, demand the growth patterns of inner weather and arguments with ourselves. It is possible for the poet, the philosopher, the historian, the jurist to impart that kind of growth in the long, slow ripening seasons of the classroom, with its incremental lectures and discussions, its accommodations of the inner arguments, its development of perspectives. The weather is intense, like the inner weather of the storm-tossed sleeper on the inside of Robert Frost's window, but the methods with which that weather is met are different from the emergency-crew methods demanded by the outside, public weather of the storm-tossed tree.

Without question there is a real and profound and abiding and essential marriage between the humanities and public issues, but I am convinced that like all real marriages it will never be the clear and certain thing that the federal planners assume for the state-based connections between academic humanists and the public arena. I am convinced that the methods of the two are not *necessarily* suited to each other at all points. I am also convinced that unless the literary humanist is willing to don the storm-togs demanded by the outer weather, the mission of the state-based program is chimerical. The mission, however, is most successful when the participating public is of such a kind that it can take the time to enter the inner weather and listen to the slower seasons of "private" growth as well as when the participating poet is willing to learn the facts and language of the "public" issue. My experience in the Connecticut Humanities Council tells me that to think we can marry academic humanism and public programs --without much definition and specification--as though they are single, absolute categories that will fit each other in all times and places, is to condemn ourselves to continuing disappointment and an increased sense of futility, which is the last thing we need.

Because we live in what is economically and technologically the most developed nation on earth, we assume that we are in a state of civilization. Yet, if our recent years of so-called "consciousness raising" have taught us anything, it is that much of our population still is fighting the old fight of trying to reach *up* to a

level of subsistence. As Carl Sandburg put it in "The People, Yes:"

> Once, having marched
> Over the margins of animal necessity
> Over the grim line of subsistence,
> Then man came
> To the deeper rituals of his bones,
> To the lights lighter than any bones,
> To the time for thinking things over,
> To the dance, the song, the story,
> Or the hours given over to dreaming,
> Once, having so marched.

Necessarily, the concerns of those caught in a crisis of subsistence are the concerns of a time of life before the lights lighter than any bones, to a time in effect, of pre-civilization, to a time before the methods of the humanities. The concerns of those so caught are the most critically immediate concerns of staying alive. And as Aristotle pointed out, the humanities are the essence of civilization, to be apprehended and made possible by at least a minimal and very necessary level of leisure. To put it most simply, one must stay alive, after all, before one can try to find out what it means to be human.

The political aims of people engaged in subsistence issues necessarily are of an emergency nature, with immediate crisis goals in view. In our year of 1978, on any street of any of our great, modern cities, two outwardly indistinguishable people may walk, and one will walk in a context of civilization wherein his thoughts dwell upon Wagner and Wittgenstein and the other will walk in a context wherein his thoughts dwell upon the necessities of a prehistoric life. Consider groups of each of such walkers as audiences for humanists.

In his identity as professor of the long view, of self-consciousness, of subtle insight, of complex and incremental knowledge, by virtue of the margins between animal necessity and the deeper rituals of his bones, between what lies on one side of "the grim line of subsistence" on the one hand and "the time for thinking things over, the dance, the song, the story, the hours given over to dreaming" on the other, the academic humanist may well not be applicable to certain kinds of organizational purposes directed toward issues of subsistence emergency or of crisis. For example, as humanists, we could illuminate the history, sociology, psychology, and morality of welfare, but we could do so meaningfully only, ironically, in a context where people were not starving or dying for lack of medicines.

In social action of total immediacy the academic humanist is either an impediment or an enemy. On the pre-humanities side of the grim line the concerns are not values and perspectives but tactical necessities--not "why" but "how," not "should we" but "can we." The whys and hows are all too totally "understood" on the pre-humanities side of the grim line. The experiences of our century have demonstrated repeatedly that neither demonstrators mobilizing for action nor nations mobilizing for war have patience or inclination for the humanities, for one can occupy the pre-humanities side of the grim line in terms of *psychological* and *ideological* as well as *animal* ne--cessities and subsistence. Our twentieth century world has long understood the profound and intricate

implications of the gauleiter's famous dictum: "When I hear the word 'culture' I draw my pistol."

Just what is it about the academic humanist, "the professor," that arouses anti-intellectual hostility on the part of the ideologue or the man in a hurry? I am not talking about those professors who are sterile, self-important fools in any context. I mean the very idea of "the professor." What is it about him that is organically inappropriate to the universe of total immediacies on the pre-humanities side of "the grim line?" I suggest that perhaps the answer is "irony." The essence of irony is a reversal of expectation. Along with the incongruity that is at the center of both humor and horror, irony shares a revelation of the disproportion between the expectations of experience and the fact of experience. I suggest that at the center of irony is a deflation of the self, exactly the deflation that the person on the grim side of the subsistence line can no longer tolerate. The self yearns for inviolability. But time, history, experience ultimately deal out death.

Irony, I think, is the revelation of the distance between the totalistic impulse toward millennium on the one hand and the fact of mortality on the other. The long view of the humanist, therefore, is one that wrestles with the identity of the diminished self, with the perspectives of history, with the knowledge that we've been here before and ought to learn something therefrom, with the suspicion that regardless of totalism, absolutism, and the immediacy of ideologies, we are not going to break into millennium in the next eighteen months or twenty thousand miles, whichever comes first. Irony is a wry, historical self-awareness that is at once a post-subsistence luxury and the deepest necessity of civilization. In short, it is *futile* to talk of irony to the totalitarian; it is presumptuous to talk of irony to the deprived victim.

Clearly, the ironic self-awareness, the product of the humanities is painful enough on any level and is more than one can expect on a governmental level from the politicans who oversee our public issues. Irony has never been a noticeable product of political bodies--not consciously, that is. But it is the kind of people who make up those bodies--generally educated, generally middle class--to whom it is not presumptuous and is necessary for the humanities to speak. There are aspects of the conclusion I have come to that I do not like at all, but ff I am to be honest about my experience in the Connecticut Humanities Council, I must admit it is the conclusion to which my experience has brought me, and it is this: the message of irony is deliverable best on the privileged side of the grim line. Irony is very much needed by the comfortable, but it is not appropriately recommended to the deprived. If the woman on welfare will be ready for the humanist's perceptions later, she needs his articulating voice now. It is those who *have* who can welcome the humanistic vision and who have the consequent responsibility of articulating it for those who cannot and most need it in the world around them.

And privilege plus humanistic self-awareness breeds guilt. I think that generally the truly aware and alive academic humanist in America feels guilty about those on the pre-humanities side of the grim line. I am certain, without knowing them personally, that many members of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy feel guilt and responsibility, commitment through

civilization, to emergency issues of pre-civilizational immediacy.

But we must not be led by guilt into a failure to distinguish between issues and people on the one hand and the organizational intentions of the applications that come to us on the other. It would be abhorrent, stupid, outrageous and incorrect to assume that poor people are incapable of programs in the humanities. People always reach and yearn and hunger for their humanity, and in certain contexts perhaps even the absolutist ideologue can be brought to think about the humanities. Surely, at the very least, the humanist has as much to learn from aspiring people as he has to teach them.

We must reach out to all the *people* on the other side of the grim line, but we must choose carefully among the *organizational programs* through which we try to do so, and should not fund programs of action simply because they come from the other side of the line. How often have you funded or been tempted to fund programs of which you despair because there is no real humanistic participation, planning, or orientation, but toward which you lean in a mixture of commitment and guilt because the program or the people represent issues or audiences you know you should join? And how often do such programs successfully meet the purposes of the Virginia Foundation?

If we recognize that we cannot serve all publics with all methods, if we accept what seems to me a wise limitation and say no to those projects in which the inner slower voice of the poet is not applicable --if, in short, we insist on projects and publics which are willing to honor the humanities and the humanist as much as we insist that the humanist get out of the ivory tower and learn to talk *with* the public, then I think we stand a fifty-fifty chance of some marvelous successes.

But are all our time and effort, all the money we dispense, all our sweat and good intentions worth investing in fifty-fifty chances in a limited context? Let me turn the coin over to its other face. One face has a motto that says "There are no private issues." To read the obverse face, I ask, "Do we have public humanities?" Where is the great competition for the creation of prize winning residential architecture that will illustrate how our mature nation has learned to marry its enormous technology to human use and the human desire for beauty? Where is the sample, model, pilot city neighborhood that puts our money to the use of all we have learned in order to create a sign of what our future can offer for the building of human lives and human neighborliness? Where is the commissioning of the great symphony, the great opera, the great play, the great novel? Where is the public award for our greatest jurists and theologians, accompanied by all the celebrational publicity that we now reserve for athletes and other show-business folk? Where is the national attention to the creation of a monumental new history of the American people or to the codification and significance of American philosophy?

As a fund granting agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities tells us again and again that the academic humanist must prepare himself to plunge into society and meet an issue-oriented segment of the public on its own terms. But where is the civilization that is

prepared to meet those humanists? In the outer weather of Robert Frost's window tree, as a society, we have done relatively little to make public our humanities or to make human our public. Which makes me all the more proud of what we in the state-based programs attempt to do.

And what of the inner world of the humanities? What poetry do the poets make when they don't make politics? I have suggested that there are no private issues, only private methods, but why do our poets by and large write out only their private methods? Most assuredly, poetry is no longer the vital, central public affair it has been in civilizations of the past, and if part of the reason that poetry has shriveled in sales, in importance, and in its dissemination, is the destruction of language in our commercialistic civilization, no small part of the reason also is the almost entirely "inner" nature--almost ruthlessly and undeviatingly so--of our contemporary poetic mode.

I do not call for an end to the "inner" mode, for that should never be. Rather I call for some variety, for some contemporary Homers, and not only the singers of the single self, the voicers of the personal event. And after all, does not the very fact of *public* action bespeak the poet's concern with public name, public self, and all the connections between success in his calling and "his parents, his wives, his girls, his children, his farm, his animals, his habits, his money, his music lessons, his drunkenness, his prejudices, his brutality, his teeth, his face, his soul?" Among our academic philosophers, where are those who accept the public role, the function, of a John Dewey? Our historians do better, but even so, how many of our academic historians accept or are even willing to try to assume the burden of the roles of public influence, like a George Bancroft?

Nevertheless, if I have said that there are no private issues, I do not say that there are no public humanities. For just as the arts--for which the task is much easier--have become more public in our national life, so for the humanities there are signs and portents of light everywhere. Public television, a vision-method never before available, offers the beginnings, however meager, of possibilities that the academic humanist never had at hand before. And in state-based programs everywhere we have colleagues, professional humanists and non-professional humanists alike, who ask the same questions I am asking now, including many academics who are eager and willing to try to create public humanities. If I ask, where are the public humanists, the historians, the philosophers, the poets, the jurists, I have to answer that if they are anywhere they are likely to be in the state-based programs and in their projects

Is a fifty-fifty chance of success in a limited context worth our money and effort? Because of the relative lack of public humanities in our society in general, never were our public-minded academic humanists more needed. Despite the lack of public humanities, never, before the Vietnam-Watergate era, has our population and our society been so self-questioning, so ready for the growing weather the humanist can bring. If I sound as though I'm saying something fatuous like "it's always darkest before the dawn," maybe, just maybe, we might be in a historical moment in which that's true. I do not have the certainty that the dawn arrives with the million dollar budget. Nor do I have the beginner's newness to the possibility of failure. In our state humanities foundations, we have all grown through our disappointments, and I have learned to combine my sense of limitation with my sense of possibility.

With this mixed sense that we are very limited in what we can do, but that what we can do has both importance and possibility it never had before, my fellow weather-watchers of our common culture, I *can* insist according to what I have seen and heard in my own small experience that there is a real source of hope in you, the state-based program members, and in you, the project participants and directors; in the actively interested legislators and representatives of business and labor and industry; and in those of you who are my fellow academic humanists. The depth and goodness of your response to what the Virginia Foundation is trying to do means that this meeting really is a salute to you, who must be admired and congratulated in your willingness to help the Foundation bring inner arguments and outer arguments, poetry, and politics, dreamers and window trees together in all kinds of weather. As Frost spoke to his window tree, we together speak to our society: "Let there never be curtain drawn between you and me."

POSTSCRIPT ON PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

HUNTING SNARKS:

ACADEMIC HUMANISTS IN PUBLIC PROGRAMS

by

Michael Sherman

To seek it with thimbles, to seek it with care;
To pursue it with forks and hope;
To threaten its life with a railway-share;
To charm it with smiles and soap!

For the Snark's a peculiar creature, that won't
Be caught in a commonplace way.
Do all that you know, and try all that you don't:
Not a chance must be wasted to-day!

The Bellman's advice to his hapless crew in Lewis Carroll's ballad seems an appropriate way to end this inquiry into some of the most perplexing and persistent problems facing the state humanities programs. What are the humanities? What is their role in society? Who is a humanist, after all? How do you find one? and how do you keep it in "captivity" after you've snared it (or vice versa)? There are times in the administration of public programs when we must all feel as if we, too, are hunting snarks.

The essays in this collection will leave most of us, I suspect, no nearer a firm solution to some of the critical problems endemic to the state humanities programs than when we started. Perhaps, however, we all profit a little from the hunt.

The authors of these essays have outlined two very distinct and important problems. On the one hand, we suffer from an imperfect taxonomy of knowledge. As old as the humanities are, they have failed to provide us -- and maybe we are unique as a generation or civilization -- with a good definition of themselves. We are dissatisfied with lists of academic disciplines. We have become shy about imposing on the humanities words like "liberal" or "conservative" which have too many political and misleading overtones (even though one always hears a lot of talk about "progress" and "retreat," "forward-looking" and "backward-looking" scholarship in the humanities). There seems to be a kind of embarrassment about talking of the humanities as expressions of "values" and perhaps it is a healthy embarrassment:

"values education" and "humanistic values" are terms which have become so over-used and so sloppily used that they have lost all precise meanings.

Some of the authors represented here, however, may be helpful in both a conceptual and practical way. Richard Wasserstrom, for example, suggests some interesting criteria for deciding who is a real humanist when he distinguishes between explanations which deliver data and explanations which explore "justifications." Defining the humanities as the study of how we think about problems -- which all of our authors do -- is a satisfying starting point in the search for a humanist.

Armed with this intriguing and suggestive tool for sorting the true humanist from the rest of the pack of academics, we in the state programs run into a second and rather different sort of problem: the sociology of knowledge. Modern university life, as most of us know and as we are constantly reminded by word and deed, seems to militate against the flourishing of those who ask the "justification questions." Declining enrollments, and the need to beat the bushes for students and supplementary funds, the quasi-administrative job of curriculum building and/or supervising, and the infamous though somewhat misunderstood bête noire of academics, "publish or perish," have made the true humanists, as Wasserstrom defines them, rare birds indeed. And even when circumstances turn up someone who thinks about how to think about problems, the state programs require that such a person also be a performer of rare gift who can reach and who enjoys reaching a non-academic audience. The reward system in higher education is not at present geared for such a person. It does not particularly encourage the talents for which we in the state programs are hunting. Caught between the problems of defining the humanities and the current state of the humanities in higher education, state program personnel seem hard pressed to locate and maintain the active participation of the right kind of humanists for public programs. I have heard no easy solutions to this difficulty in regional or national meetings of state program staff and committee members. I read no easy solutions in the essays in this collection. But then, I didn't expect to hear or read any. Sometimes it is comfort enough to know that a real problem exists.

What I have heard in regional and national meetings is discussion of another kind of problem, closely related to the larger ones our authors explore here. In a few cases, state committees or their staffs have located the kind of humanist we all want at each of our programs. The question then arises about re-using and perhaps over-using this valuable resource. Where we have the choice, should the state committees and their staffs call upon the tried and true or venture out again into the groves of academe in search of new participants? There are compelling arguments on both sides.

Part of the argument rests on how the state programs are going to define "success." An enthusiastic response among audience participants is a good and valid starting point; and here, I suppose, lies the greatest justification for developing what is rather crudely called "a stable" of acclaimed lecturers and discussion leaders. In addition, several state programs have begun

using the image of the old Lyceum and Chautauqua movements to describe their own activities and purposes. That image and the tradition that lies behind it give validity to this practice of employing a limited group of humanists in programs around a state. In one sense, it matters little or not at all that the same point of view, or even the same lecture will be given time and again. The tradition and the criterion of success validate the practice and both are hard to argue with. As long as the quality of the presentation remains high and the performance enthusiastic and compelling, this approach to personnel problems has much to recommend it. As long as the right kinds of humanists for these programs remain scarce -- and scholars are not, in fact, beating down the doors of staff offices to get a chance to display their intellectual virtuosity -- the "stable" approach is a thoroughly convincing solution to the larger problem of snark hunting.

Consider, however, some of the arguments on the other side. First, the state programs already look something like guild organizations. Whatever other worthy purposes they serve, the state programs also appear to be extra-mural employers for moonlighting humanists, who, on the whole, have fewer opportunities for consultant positions than their colleagues in the social sciences, and who have enjoyed much less institutional and federal support per capita and per project than their colleagues in the natural sciences. Although the state programs in the humanities undoubtedly serve the public interest, they also clearly serve the interests of the humanists who participate in them. Narrowing the circle to a reliable few emphasizes the guild-like image we are liable to present both to the academic community and to the various non-academic constitutencies we are meant to serve. That is an unhappy result of a successful hunt.

Second, by not actively seeking and encouraging new participants among humanists, the state programs run a serious risk of suffering intellectual stagnation. The recent expansion of grant guidelines in most states suggests that the humanities programs were clearly beginning to ossify. Looking for new ways to bring the humanities and out-of-school adults together has been generally recognized as a healthy development. Sameness of views might be just as debilitating to the success of the state programs as sameness of projects appeared to have been before the guidelines were revised.

Third, with new guidelines there are bound to be new pockets of interest and expertise to be mined by the state committees. Where once only those with an interest in public policy could find a place in our programs, we seem now to be collectively interested in displaying the versatility of the humanities and of humanists. Such a goal, implicit or explicit as it may have been in the case of each state committee's deliberations on new guidelines, seems to argue against relying on a small group of humanists. Indeed, the assumptions which appear to be behind the new guidelines in most states make it incumbent on the state committees to encourage the injection of "new blood" into the rosters of personnel performing under state committee grants.

Fourth, I personally think the state committees and their administrative staffs have an obligation to educate the humanists in the academy about the role of the humanities in the

society outside the walls. If we cannot convince those who teach the humanities that what they teach young adults in school is also important for older adults who are out of school, then we cannot honestly hope or even try to convince those older out-of-school adults that the humanities continue to speak to the needs and concerns of their lives. The state committees have, perhaps, taken the mandate from the NEH too narrowly and too seriously: Certainly we must help broaden and deepen both the appreciation and understanding of the humanities among out-of-school adults; but it looks as if we must also educate the educators in the humanities about the power and versatility of what they teach.

It is now time to return our attention to the "peculiar creature, that won't/Be caught in a commonplace way." Perhaps these essays will have renewed the energy required for the task; perhaps they will have given it some direction and shape. Admittedly, we are still more or less lost in the maze of definitions. So far as the problem of the taxonomy of knowledge is concerned, we may not have made the kind of progress that is calculable or immediately useful. Anita Silvers' point about the open-endedness of humanistic study, however, is important and comforting here. But as far as the sociology of knowledge is concerned, it seems that the state programs might just make one of their goals defeating the "system," such as it is. To some extent, money talks -- even to scholars in the humanities. We can try to lure them out into the public forums with stipends. Another tactic -- far the nobler one to be sure -- is the appeal to whatever we can glean from the many definitions of the humanities we have all seen and struggled with. Professor Wasserstrom called the true humanist the lover of knowledge, and Horace Newcomb emphasized the private passion which stimulates and motivates humanistic study. Perhaps the state programs can successfully challenge these passionate lovers to declare themselves. Perhaps the real challenge to the state programs is luring the lovers out of the woods to where they will find a rather receptive audience for their declarations. To quote the Bellman one last time,

> Do all that you know, and try
> all that you don't:
> Not a chance must be wasted
> today!

Happy hunting!